

II. SPECIFICATION AMENDMENTS

Please replace the paragraph beginning on page 15, line 27 through page 15, line 19 as rewritten below:

Fig. 9 illustrates one such gas meter, generically denoted 805. As shown in FIG. 9, meter 805 includes measuring device 903 which measures the amount of gas consumed by the customer associated therewith. Like PSD 110, meter 805 also includes memory 907 similar to SRAM 207, clock 905 similar to clock 205, and cryptographic engine 920 similar to cryptographic engine 220. Memory 907 comprises counter ~~833~~933 similar to counter 233, and register 930 similar to ascending register 230 to keep track of the amount of gas consumed. Processor ~~903~~901 creates consumption records periodically, e.g., once every 15 minutes, to account for the gas consumptions in the corresponding periods. The format of each consumption record is similar to that of Fig. 3, although the field corresponding to field 305 contains information concerning the amount of gas consumed in the corresponding period instead of a transaction amount. The consumption records, thus created, constitute consumption log 941 in memory 907. The records may be cryptographically signed before they are communicated to data center 803 through communication facility 945 which includes, e.g., a modem. To that end, memory 907 includes at least private key 938 for use by cryptographic engine 920 to cryptographically sign the consumption records, in accordance with a public key algorithm, e.g., the DSA. Copies of the public key corresponding to private key 938 are provided beforehand to data center 803 and gas company computer 850 for authenticating the consumption records communicated by meter 805.

Please replace the paragraph beginning on page 17, line 13 through line 33 as rewritten below:

It should be noted that data center 803 may serve more than one provider providing resources to effect the finance arrangement in accordance with the invention. Fig. 10 illustrates one such arrangement where data center 803 serves a gas company and an electric company to account for the gas consumptions and electric consumptions by their customers, respectively. As shown in Fig. 10, apart from gas meters 805-1 through 805-M, electric meters 1005-1 through 1005-K, which are designed similarly to meter 805, communicate records of electric consumptions to data center 803 in accordance with the predetermined protocol, where K represents and integer greater than one. Data center 803 computes the charges for the respective gas and electric consumptions, and causes settlement system 865 to transfer funds covering such charges from the customer accounts to the predetermined gas company and electric company accounts, respectively. In addition, gas company computer ~~950~~850 and electric company computer 1050 may audit and/or analyze the consumption records forwarded thereto by data center 803.